

Bringier, L. (1821)
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Earthquakes and Eruptions

On the sixth day of January, 1812, during the earthquakes* which destroyed New-Madrid, and which were felt two hundred miles around, I happened to be passing in its neighbourhood, where the principal shock took place. The violence of the earthquake having disturbed the earthy strata impending over the subterraneous cavities, existing probably in an extensive bed of wood, highly carbonized, occasioned the whole superior mass to settle. This, press- with all its weight upon the water that had filled the lower cavities, occasioned a displacement of this fluid, which forced its passage through, blowing up the earth with loud explosions. It rushed out in all quarters, bringing with it an enormous quantity of carbonized wood, reduced mostly into dust, which was ejected to the height of from ten to fifteen feet, and fell in a black shower, mixed with the sand which its rapid motion had forced along; at the same time, the roaring and whistling produced by the impetuosity of the air escaping from its confinement, seemed to increase the horrible disorder of the trees which every where encountered each other, being blown up, cracking and splitting, and falling by thousands at a time. In the mean time, the surface was sinking, and a black liquid was rising up to the belly of my horse, who stood motionless, struck with a panic of terror.

These occurrences occupied nearly two minutes; the trees, shaken in their foundation, kept falling here and there, and the whole surface of the country remained covered with holes, which, to compare small things with great, resembled so many craters of volcanoes, surrounded with a ring of carbonized wood and sand, which rose to the height of about seven feet.

I had occasion, a few months after, to sound the depth of several of these holes, and found them not to exceed twenty feet; but I must remark the quicksand had washed into them. The country here was formerly perfectly level, and covered with numerous small prairies of various sizes, dispersed through the woods. Now it is covered with slaches (ponds) and sand hills or mounticules, which are found principally where the earth was formerly the lowest; probably because, in such places, the water broke through with more facility.

A circumstance worth noticing, was a tendency to carbonization that I perceived in all the vegetable substances soaking in the ponds produced by these eruptions. It was about seven months after